



State Senator

Neal J. Kedzie

11th Senate District

**Testimony on Assembly Bill 394
Senator Neal Kedzie
Assembly Committee on Transportation
December 3, 2009**

Representative Steinbrink and members of the Committee, thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 394.

Under current law, the Department of Transportation is required to periodically review the plate design for Wisconsin's special registration plates, and redesign the plate if warranted. Over the last few years, the Department has issued new plates designed in a manner to more closely replicate a standard license plate. However, shortly after the new plates were issued, I received numerous complaints from constituents about the redesign, primarily related to changes made to Veteran's plates and Firefighter plates. You may have heard similar complaints from your constituents as well.

In response to that concern from our constituents, Representative Lothian and I offer Assembly Bill 394, which would revert the Firefighter and EMT plate back to the original design that existed prior to January 1, 2007, when the new design was issued. The original design would then be permanent, as the bill exempts this type of plate from the periodic review requirement by the Department.

While I would categorize most specialized license plates as ornamental, as a former volunteer fire fighter, I know Firefighter and EMT plates serve a legitimate and functional purpose. In many areas of the state, law enforcement personnel are able to quickly identify an approaching or parked vehicle with such plates during an emergency. Because of this functionality, we believe these plates should maintain a unique design other than the standard Wisconsin license plate. Further, I would note there is precedent for this change, as the Department voluntarily agreed to revert back to the old Veteran's plate after concerns were raised about that redesign.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 394, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



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32ND DISTRICT

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Towns:

Bloomfield, Darien,
Delavan, Geneva, Linn,
Lyons, Sharon,
Walworth, Wheatland

Villages:

Darien, Fontana,
Genoa City, Sharon,
Walworth, Williams Bay

THOMAS A. LOTHIAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Rep. Tom Loethian
Assembly Bill 394 – Public Hearing
Assembly Committee on Transportation
December 3, 2009

Thank you, Chairman Steinbrink and committee members, for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 394, legislation dealing with the design of specialized license plates for firefighters, EMTs, and first responders.

In 2007, the Department of Transportation revamped the design of their specialized license plates to become more uniform. The new plates had an identical design with the only difference being the symbol specific to the individual group. This was done for the National Guard, the University of Wisconsin, Veterans, and Civilian Services, including fire fighters, EMTs, and first responders.

It has been brought to my attention by a number of my local fire fighters and EMTs that this new design has caused a number of problems. With many fire fighters or EMTs going straight to an accident from their home, it is imperative that local police can easily identify them by their specialized license plate. This has not been the case. These plates have caused delays for fire fighters and first responders in being able to attend to emergency situations.

Shortly after this new design was enacted, veteran groups raised complaints over the design. A new distinctive plate for veterans was designed in order to take care of these concerns. Assembly Bill 394 is simply asking for the same distinction for our fire fighters, EMT, and first responders. The legislation calls for their plates to return to their original design before the change in 2007.

Thank you, again, for allowing me to testify on this important bill. I would be happy to answer any questions.



CITY OF DELAVAN FIRE DEPARTMENT
CAPTAIN TIM STURTEVANT
222 South 7th Street
Delavan, WI 53115-1829



May 5, 2008

State Senator Neal Kedzie
Room 126 South
State Capitol
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

State Representative Thomas Lothian
Room 306 North
State Capitol
P.O. Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Senator Kedzie and Dear Representative Lothian:

In July of 2007 the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) began replacing firefighter plates at renewal time. The new plate is not at all distinctive like the original firefighter plate design was. Section, 341.14(6r)(b)1, Wisconsin Statutes, states in part, "...the department shall issue to the person special plates whose colors and design shall indicate that the vehicle is owned by a person who is a member of the applicable special group." The new plate's "colors and design" do not make the vehicle recognizable as belonging to a firefighter until you are quite close to the vehicle.

We are requesting that the DOT return the firefighter license plate design to the one we had before or to one very similar. In speaking with our fellow firefighters throughout the area, and those that we speak to from around the state, the overwhelming majority agree with us.

It is interesting to note that DOT had also changed the military group license plate design to a non-distinctive looking plate in July, 2007. However, due to objections, DOT worked with some interested legislators and, in July of this year, will be returning the military group design back to one that retains more of the red, white and blue that those plates had before. This is the type of action that we seek for our plate design and we are hoping that you will work together and with the DOT to accomplish this.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding this matter. (Please direct correspondence to Captain Tim Sturtevant at the address above or by email to: tdsturtevant@sbcglobal.net)

Sincerely,
City of Delavan Fire Department Members

Tim Sturtevant	Paul Kuehni	Kyle D. Gumbury	
Eiji Sturtevant	Kurti Kalandia	Alan Smith	
Chris Allen	Robert Chapman	Donald Herristie	
Robert C. Ludeke	John [unclear]	Andrew Bass	
John [unclear]	Jennifer O'Neill	Adam [unclear]	
John [unclear]	Brian Reed	John [unclear]	
John [unclear]	John [unclear]	John [unclear]	
Chris Lotz	John [unclear]	John [unclear]	
Donnie Herristie	John [unclear]	John [unclear]	

P.S. I believe that SB20 had an amendment to it regarding this, however, maybe DOT can't be convinced without legislation. Tim Sturtevant



Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association

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DATE: December 3, 2009
TO: Transportation Committee
FROM: Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association
RE: Assembly Bill 394

The Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association asks that you please support Assembly Bill 394. The change in the firefighter plate that was made two years ago created a firefighter and emergency medical technician plate that is not as distinguishable as those plates were before the change.

There are 864 fire departments in the State of Wisconsin and about 87 % of the over 23,000 firefighters in Wisconsin are volunteer. Each of those fire departments has different rules for their volunteers to respond to emergency incidents. Many of the firefighters are able to respond from their home or place of employment directly to the emergency incident scene in their personal vehicles if the fire department rules allow. The firefighter or emergency medical license plate on their personal vehicle is often recognized and used by the authorities securing the emergency scene to allow the emergency responder access to the scene. The older style design plate, which is proposed in this bill, was recognizable from a greater distance and allowed those securing the scene to give quicker access to the scene.

Assembly Bill 394 will give the volunteer emergency responder the older style designed license plate and in turn give quick access to the emergency scene. Thank you for considering the much-needed change in license plate design for our volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians.

If you have questions please contact Dave Bloom, Legislative Liaison at 608-444-3324.

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Of Wisconsin

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Durand, WI 54736

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December 3, 2009

Mr. Chairman & Members of Your Committee:

I'm Larry Plumer, President of the Wisconsin State Firefighters Association serving 12,000 volunteer firefighters; President of the Wisconsin Fire & EMS Legislative Leadership Coalition and I also serve as Fire Chief of the Durand City/Rural Fire Department.

In Wisconsin we have approximately 863 fire departments and 450 ambulance services of which 701 fire departments are volunteer, 105 combined departments and 35 career departments and I'm here to strongly support Assembly Bill 394 relating to: the color and design of special distinguishing registration plates for fire fighters and emergency medical technicians (EMT's).

I served on the committee that originally designed these special plates that were previously used by all firefighters and EMT's and was very surprised on the change that had been made by the Department of Transportation, especially since no advanced information was presented to any fire or EMT organizations prior to this change.

These plates served many purposes for fire departments and EMT personnel, to just name a few:

- 1.) Many firefighters use their personal vehicle to drive directly to a fire scene or disaster area and which the local law enforcement personnel previously found very easy to identify and speeded up the attack or extraction needed. No time was lost trying to identify vehicles, personnel or plates.
- 2.) These plates not only helped volunteer departments, it also assisted combination fire departments and full time departments when they called more personnel in.
- 3.) We've had several incidents where individuals state that they are a member of a department but there is then no way of checking this out. Distinctive fire plates for fire fighters are an excellent method of identification for law enforcement of whose who.
- 4.) We also hope that we won't be charged again for these plates as we've paid twice already. Personal ID plates had a set charge each year and we have no problem with it at this time, which would be up to the individual firefighter or EMT.

In closing, I sincerely hope you would advance Bill 394 for passage. It is an excellent tool for identification at any and all calls. We're there to save lives and property and time is very essential to our departments for proper manpower to achieve this to the people we serve in Wisconsin.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Larry Plumer



Testimony

**To: Representative John Steinbrink, Chair
Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation**
From: Michael Hood, WEMSA
Date: December 3, 2009
Re: Testimony supporting AB-394: EMT\Firefighter License Plates

Good morning Chairperson Steinbrink and members of the Committee.

My name is Mike Hood. I am a Captain for the Town of Raymond Fire and Rescue Department; I am a licensed EMT-IV Tech; and, I am testifying today on behalf of the Wisconsin EMS Association. On behalf of our 7,500 Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and nearly 380 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) members in Wisconsin, I am here today to express our support for Assembly Bill 394.

Wisconsin EMTs once had distinguishing license plates, along with firefighters. However with the change of the design in 2007 that made the plates more uniform with other organizations, there has come a deluge of complaints from our membership statewide.

The vast majority of complaints received by the Wisconsin EMS Association have been two-fold: 1) The current plates are too similar to other organizational special plates, which creates difficulty in quickly differentiating vehicles at emergency scenes; and, 2) Prior to 2007, emergency service volunteers perceived the special license plates as a symbol of recognition that exuded honor and respect for their volunteerism and sacrifice while serving their local communities.

In the end, when you think of the level of savings to Wisconsin's taxpayers generated by our volunteers and the fact that all of our emergency services personnel put themselves in hazardous situations to protect and serve our local communities – restoring the emergency service plates to the level of distinction provided prior to 2007 is a small way to achieve both recognition of our emergency service personnel and improve recognition effectiveness at the scene of an emergency.

The Wisconsin EMS Association respectfully requests the committee to support passage of Assembly Bill 394.

Thank you.